

Taking Aim At 'Teddy Bear'

WASHINGTON — (UPI) — Harry Dent, a White House political adviser specializing in the South, believes long-range Republican strategy calls for encouraging a widespread Democratic defection to thwart an expected bid by Sen. Edward Kennedy for the presidency in 1976.

Already dismissing Sen. George McGovern's chances of beating President Nixon this fall, Dent sees "Teddy Bear" — as he is fond of calling the Democratic senator from Massachusetts — as the big Republican target four years hence.

"A lot of people recognize that after the defeat of George McGovern in '72, the whole thing will be set up for 'Teddy Bear' in '76," Dent said.

"Teddy Bear is in the briar patch," said Dent, a former GOP state chairman from South Carolina and aide to Sen. Strom Thurmond (R.S.C.) until he joined the White House staff as special counsel to the President.

Another McGovern

"His (Kennedy's) day is for '76," Dent said. "I'm going about preaching to a lot of people that (with Kennedy) you've got McGovern all over again.

"Nixon is strong enough this term. He can save the country in '72 from McGovern. We're going to have to save it from Teddy Bear in '76."

Dent said a shift of Democrats to the Republican camp already has begun in the South, where McGovern forces have taken over the Democratic party machinery and are turning off the voters.

He predicted the movement will spread across the country.

In Virginia, McGovern supporters seized control of the state party before the Democratic national convention, and Dent said growing numbers of party regulars — notably state legislators — are switching sides. Former Gov. Mills Godwin has joined the Nixon campaign, he noted.

Split Tickets

"As more conservative Democrats just sign off because they are disgusted with the National Democratic Party and its liberal trend," he said, they will vote split tickets and ultimately will register as Republicans.

This will prove true of Democratic officeholders as well as rank and file voters, Dent said. They may start out as independent candidates, but will wind up as Republicans, he predicted.

"As the McGovern machine continues to roll, they are going to run out a lot of what I call good, sensible Democrats," Dent said.

"They may stay in the 'independent pasture' for a while, but eventually they will jump the traces into the Republican party," Dent said.

This is one reason, he said, that President Nixon has decided against moving ideologically to the left to pre-empt McGovern's liberal position, and will offer a choice for dissatisfied conservative Democrats.
